

For some, re-upping pays more than cash

BY RICK EMERT

Stars and Stripes

MOSUL, Iraq — Through the first seven months of his unit's Iraq deployment, Spc. Richard McCauley knew he was absolutely without-a-doubt-no-question-in-his-mind getting out of the Army when his enlistment ended in 2007.

He made fun of friends who re-enlisted, calling them crazy.

McCauley, from the Germany-based 94th Engineer Combat Battalion (Heavy), was positive he was done with the Army and ready for the civilian world, almost right up to the day — Wednesday — when he extended through 2009.

"I've been catching a lot of hell from all of my buddies," he said, laughing. "I guess you should never say 'never.'"

Even though he had two years remaining on his first enlistment, McCauley said concerns about his daughter's health and his financial situation were weighing heavily on his mind.

"My daughter has a hole in her eardrum, and doctors are treating a bad infection so they can see if they need to do surgery," he said. "She's getting the best medical attention, and I realized I didn't want to give up that benefit yet."

He also is trying to save for a new car and some land to build on in Oklahoma, so the \$5,000 bonus he got for extending his enlistment — which is tax-free because

he's serving in a combat zone — was the clincher, he said.

For some soldiers, the tax-free bonus is just what's needed to sway them to sign up again. For others, it is only part of the package, said Sgt. 1st Class Craig Gransbery, the battalion's career counselor.

Gransbery has re-enlisted 88 soldiers since March 1 and given out \$822,000 in tax-free bonuses. With three more re-enlistments scheduled for Friday, Gransbery was to meet his objectives for the number of re-enlistments the battalion had hoped to have by the end of fiscal 2005.

Many of the soldiers re-enlist for certain guaranteed options, such as being stationed at the base of their choice or to change career fields, Gransbery said.

"It's great to be able to give out the bonuses, but it's even better to see the soldiers get the assignments they want or the jobs they want," Gransbery said. "Usually, the bonus is just gravy for them."

Sgt. William Hunnicutt, also from 94th Engineers, got a Hungry Man portion of gravy. He received a \$22,500 bonus for a four-year re-enlistment.

"I'm going to use that money to pay off some bills, invest and buy some toys," he said.

Hunnicutt agreed to re-enlist only if he could go to airborne school. He eventually wants to become a medic and go into the Special Forces. He plans to be a career soldier, unless things don't



Photo courtesy of Craig Gransbery

Sgt. 1st Class Craig Gransbery has re-enlisted 88 soldiers since March 1 and given out \$822,000 in tax-free bonuses.

work out with changing career fields, he said.

Other soldiers in the battalion won't be swayed by the bonus, however.

"I think I've talked informally or casually to all the soldiers in the battalion," Gransbery said. "There are some who are not going to re-enlist no matter what. Some of them joke about it and say things like 'Even if [the bonus] was a million dollars, I wouldn't re-enlist.'"

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Sgt. 1st Class Craig Gransbery

That's the case with Spc. Charles Knouse. When his enlistment ends in November 2006, he will put away his combat boots for good.

"It's the deployments, really," he said. "I enlisted in the Reserves when I was 18, and I was in basic training for [Sept. 11, 2001]. My unit started getting picked apart for deployments. I decided if I was going to deploy anyway, I might as well be on active duty."

And deploy he did. He joined the 94th Engineers in Iraq for the last couple of months of Operation Iraqi Freedom I, and came back with all of this deployment with the unit.

"There are too many deployments," he said. "I feel like I sold a year of my life away. I missed my baby's first steps and my son's first day of school. There's so

much I can't get back. I don't know if my relationship with my wife will ever be the same, because I've been away from home for so long."

There are other soldiers in Knouse's boat, and many others who are undecided, Gransbery said. He said when he talks to the soldiers who are sitting on the fence, he tells them to wait out the Army's current high deployment tempo.

"I try to emphasize that it will get better," he said. "This is probably the worst three- to five-year stint they'll see. I believe they'll be rewarded with the benefits of the new Army."

"The whole country sees what we are doing here and supports us. When it comes time to increase our pay and benefits, I don't think they'll think twice about it."

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CRAG GRANSBERY/Courtesy of the U.S. Army

First Lt. Christine Gritzke, left, re-enlists Spc. Richard McCauley on Wednesday in Mosul, Iraq. Gritzke was McCauley's platoon leader when the 94th Engineer Combat Battalion (Heavy) first deployed to Iraq. McCauley got a \$5,000 tax-free bonus for his re-enlistment.

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